THE DISCOVERY OF ANÆSTHESIA.

The medical and dental fraternities of Connecticut, and others who respect the memory of the late Dr. HORACE WELLS respectfully present an application to the general assembly for a grant of a few thousand dollars toward a monument in honor of the discovery which, more than any other of the century, tends to relieve the human race from physical pain. They do not intend to rely upon that grant alone, by any means. It will be largely increased by private subscriptions. The principal facts of the discovery are as follows:

First—Dr. Horace Wells of Hartford, on the 10th of December, 1844, while seeing that Colonel Sam. Cooley received quite a severe injury without feeling pain, by striking against the seats of a public room, while under the influence of nitrous oxide gas, conceived the idea that, by breathing the gas more deeply and freely, one could have a tooth extracted, or other surgical operations performed without pain.

Second—On the 11th of December, 1844, Dr. Wells, not feeling at liberty to request another person to breathe the gas more freely than had formerly been done, lest life should be endangered thereby, determined to, and did, himself freely breathe the gas so as to produce entire insensibility, and had a large molar tooth extracted by Dr. Riggs without pain—thus first demonstrating the grand discovery of MODERN ANÆSTHESIA. He voluntarily did this, not knowing what the effect of the more free use of the gas would be, and when the universal impression was that it would very greatly endanger, if not destroy life.

Third—During the succeeding three or four weeks, Doctors Wells and Riggs continued to use the gas in the extraction of teeth, with entire relief from pain; and during this time Dr. Marcy suggested to Doctor Wells the use of sulphuric ether, instead of the gas, it being known to be in its primary effects quite similar, and much more easily obtained and convenient to administer. It was used at least once by Dr. Wells, with entire success, in extracting a tooth, and once by Dr. Marcy in the removal of an encysted tumor, but as its effects were not fully understood and were thought more dangerous than those of the gas, Dr. Wells, by the advise of his medical friends, confined himself chiefly to the use of the latter.

Fourth—Within a few weeks after the discovery, Dr. Wells visited Boston, and made known his discovery to Dr. Morton, his former partner in business, and to Doctors Jackson, Warren and Haywood, two of them surgeons to the Massachusetts General Hospital. He administered the gas to one person for the purpose of extracting a tooth, and was assisted by Dr. Morton, but owing to the fact that the bag containing the gas was removed too soon, the experiment was a partial failure, and he was hissed and derided as an impostor, thus deferring the general use of anæthesia nearly two years.

Fifth—It, however, appears from the account books of Dr. Riggs, and his depositions, that he continued to use the gas in the extraction of teeth thenceforward until the discovery of chloroform in 1847; and also that Dr. Wells used it in his practice whenever his health permitted his attention to business. It further appears that Dr. Morton made two or three visits to Hartford during the years 1845 and 1846 and had conferences with Dr. Wells in reference to the use of the nitrous oxide gas, and that on the last of these occasions, he asked directions of Dr. Wells as to the manner of preparing the gas, and was directed to apply to Dr. Jackson, of Boston, as he was a chemist and would give him a pure article. It further appears that he did so apply, and that Dr. Jackson suggested to him the use of ether instead, as its effects were known to be quite similar to those of the nitrous oxide when breathed for the purpose of producing its primary and exhilarating effects.

Sixth—On the 30th of September, 1846, Dr. Morton pulled a tooth from the mouth of Eben Frost, at his office in Boston, while he was under the influence of sulphuric ether, as suggested by Dr. Jackson; and from this time forward it was used extensively in this country and in Europe.

Seventh—The use of nitrous oxide gas has recently been extensively revived so that it is now used daily in dentistry in hundreds of cases, both in this country and Europe. It has also been used in surgery in the performance of capital operations with entire success, and the testimony of eminent surgeons is to the effect that the system comes more rapidly and kindly under its influence than under that of any other anæsthetic now known, and that its subsequent effects are much less depressing, thus substantiating fully all that was ever claimed for it by Dr. Wells.

It appears from the above facts—

First—That to Dr. Wells alone belongs the honor of having first demonstrated the grand principle of MODERN ANÆSTHESIA, and that he did this with nitrous oxide gas as the agent, on December 11, 1844.

Second—That Dr. Morton, having assisted Dr. Wells in his experiment at Boston, and having been entirely conversant with what he had done in Hartford, demonstrated the same principle in Boston with the use of another agent, namely, sulphuric ether, it having been suggested to him by Dr. Jackson. To Dr. Morton, therefore, belongs whatever of honor pertains to the performance of such an experiment, and to having assisted in the introduction of modern anæsthesia to the world.

H. P. STEARNS, M. D.
Chairman of Committee Conn. Med. Society

JAS. McMANUS, D. D. S,
Chairman Com. State Dental Society

NLM